

## ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A Toast responded to at the Banquet in honor of Abraham Lincoln given by  
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Mr. Toastmaster, Ladies and Gentlemen:

When one comes to a consideration of the life of Abraham Lincoln as a factor in American history, he at once realizes that to think of him purely as an individual is entirely too narrow a viewpoint. But if we are to fully comprehend the true grandeur of his character we must think of him as a chosen human instrument in the hands of God for the accomplishment of a great work for the benefit of mankind. And, when we contemplate his wonderful genius, when we analyze his great and varied public service, when we think of his tender hearted humanity and his never-failing charity and mercy, when we are brought face to face with his magnificent patriotism and his incomprehensible largeness of soul, we realize that his life and his achievements have been, and will ever continue to be, a national inspiration.

It seems to me that it must indeed be a doubting Thomas who fails to see in the history of this country the guiding and directing hand of God. When we see the people of the thirteen colonies scattered along the Atlantic seaboard, spreading into a great nation of one hundred millions of souls, where the oppressed of God's people of every nation and tongue may come and enjoy the indescribable blessings of a broader freedom than the world has ever known; where the right to worship according to the dictates of one's conscience is plainly guaranteed and securely protected; where the govern-

mental burdens are distributed with exact equality and with reference to the just principle of ability to pay; where human slavery cannot exist, but where every human being, regardless of race, color or previous condition of servitude, may enjoy liberty and pursue happiness in his own way, restricted only by the natural limitation that his rights must terminate at the point where their further exercise would infringe corresponding rights of his neighbor; where its territory, in less than a century and a half, has extended from ocean to ocean, and from the Gulf to the Lakes, and to the islands of the seas, and its influence as a world power is recognized and respected to the uttermost parts of the earth, and is looked to by the peoples of the old world as the land of promise and of opportunity,—verily we must be convinced that this is more than a natural growth and that our country and our people have been the peculiar objects of God's bountiful providence.

In this connection, it seems to me worth while to pause and note the great similarity and parallel between the lives of the Great Emancipator and the Man of Galilee. But, before doing so, permit me to assure you that I have not assigned to myself the impossible task of endeavoring to compare things finite, human and temporal with things infinite, spiritual and eternal. But as bearing upon the question that Lincoln was chosen of God for the accomplishment of a mighty work, the peculiar coincidences in the two careers may be

of interest.

Christ was the son of Mary, a plain woman in a humble station in life; and Lincoln was the son of Nancy, a daughter of the frontier and of the wilderness. The foster-father of Mary's Son was Joseph, a carpenter; and the father of Abraham, was Thomas, a carpenter. The birthplace of the Nazarene was a manger in Bethlehem, and the birthplace of Lincoln was a crude log cabin in the Southland, no better, perhaps, than the poorest stable in all Judea.

Early in the life of Christ we find Him displaying the unmistakable evidence of His genius, when, as a boy, He disputed with the doctors in the temple. And in the first public writing of Abraham Lincoln, when, at the age of twenty-three, he became a candidate for the legislature in Illinois, we discover the convincing proof of his genius, for it was in that announcement he said: "Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one, that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men by rendering myself worthy of their esteem."

The most beautiful of Christ's public teachings was His Sermon on the Mount; and the most beautiful of Abraham Lincoln's addresses was the one delivered from the hills of Gettysburg. When Christ taught in the Temple, His hearers marvelled at His great learning, and asked the question, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" And when we read Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, and are charmed by its unsurpassed literary beauty, are we not prompted to ask the question, "How knoweth this son of the frontier let-

ters, having never had an opportunity to learn?"

Each lived a life of pathetic sorrow and sadness, and was frequently the object of ridicule and scoffing. As the mission of Christ, as Christians believe, was to strike the moral shackles from a sin-cursed world, and to establish mankind in its true relationship to God, the mission of Abraham Lincoln was to strike the physical shackles from millions of God's people, and to place them in their true relationship to their neighbors. While Christ fought and condemned sin, He loved and ever dealt gently with the sinner; and while Lincoln hated and condemned the institution of slavery, he ever dealt gently and considerately with the slaveholder. Christ was betrayed by Judas, the traitor, and suffered a violent death on Calvary; and Lincoln was the first of the American Chief Executives to be the victim of assassination and to die a violent death. Yet neither was called until his mission was fulfilled, and each was called as soon as it was accomplished, the one to sit on the right hand of God, and the other to bask in the never-ending sunshine of His presence:—the life of one to be a blessing to all mankind throughout the endless cycles of eternity, and the life of the other to be an inspiration to his own people, and an uplifting influence in the cause of humanity everywhere.

You will all recall the peculiarly affecting incident of the President's last meeting with his cabinet. General Grant was present and was anxious and uneasy because no word had been received from General Sherman. But Mr. Lincoln said to him, "The news will come soon and come favorably, for last night I had my peculiar dream,



which always precedes great events. I seemed to be in a singular and indescribable vessel, and was moving with great rapidity toward a dark and indefinite shore. I had this same dream before the battles of Antietam, Murfreesboro, Gettysburg and Vicksburg." And his cabinet was deeply and strangely impressed.

I wonder if there had been present at that historic meeting one, like Joseph of old, touched by the divine spark, and endowed with the power of interpreting dreams, that this might not have been made to mean the Great Emancipator's Gethsemane, and that the singular and indescribable vessel was the guiding and directing hand of God, and the dark and indefinite shore was the boundless limits of eternity, toward which his master-spirit was then rapidly, though to him unconsciously, moving, and where it was soon to be at peace! For, within a few hours from that time, as the flickering rays from a kerosene lamp wrestled for mastery with the approaching rays of dawn, his great, sympathetic heart ceased to beat, and his spirit passed over the bar. And as, in the last agonizing moments on the cross, Jesus muttered, "It is finished"; so the awful stillness of that occasion was broken by Secretary Stanton, who said, "Now he belongs to the ages."

And in my imagination I fancy I can see a seraph waiting on the other shore to receive him, and to take him by the hand, and, as a doting father directs the toddling footsteps of the first-born man child, lead him through the valley of the shadow of death into green pastures and beside still waters, until the great day when Gabriel, seated upon the horn of a cloud, shall announce from his trumpet, that time is

no more, and the Mount of Olives shall be cleft in twain, and the sun shall wink out like a candle, and float off through space like a cinder, and the moon shall turn to blood and go down to rise no more forever, and the stars of the firmament, which the Master made to differ from one another in glory, are loosed from their leashes and are hurled in one mad dash to destruction, and the earth and seas shall yawn and stretch and give up their dead,—that through all this chaos and confusion can be seen the sturdy and stalwart figure of Abraham Lincoln, resplendent and grand in the fulness of his unmatched manhood, and over his formerly care-worn face will be seen the smile of unspeakable peace as he stands in the presence of One, arrayed in garments of spotless white, with hand uplifted and halo about His head, and hears from the lips of the Master the blessed "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the Kingdom of God."

It is said that, as its territory is its body, and the material activities of its people its blood, so patriotism is the vital breath of a nation.

Reference has already been made to our broad territorial expanse and, indirectly, to the wonderful achievements of our people in a comparatively brief period of time. And that brings me to a few brief reflections on the subject of patriotism, the vitalizing breath of the whole. There has perhaps never been a time since the days of Abraham Lincoln when an efficient cultivation of patriotism is more necessary or important than the present. When the doors of this great national asylum were thrown open, and a hearty welcome was extended to the weary and the heavy-laden of the Old

World, we soon realized that America was to be a composite nation, that its citizenship was to be a cosmopolitan citizenship, and that we were to draw heavily upon the peoples of the Old World to settle and cultivate our soil and to develop our natural resources. This has continued to the point where our nation is now referred to as the great melting pot, into which is being placed the mixed blood of many peoples, and we are endeavoring, through the action of the white flames, to purify the mass and bring forth a new substance. And we are just now wondering whether the process of the melting pot is to be a success. For this is the great and impending question: Can a people so complex in blood as ours ever become a thoroughly patriotic people, with an eye single to the welfare of a new nation, with all of the influences of birth and ancestry eliminated by the melting pot? Indeed, whether it be possible to thus create a new people loyal to a new flag?

When we see the great nations of Europe engaged in the awful struggle of war, the event of which means so much to the contestants, and when the United States of America, thank God, is an onlooker and not a party to that wholesale official murder, it seems to me that it is not at all unnatural, but is rather to be expected, that our citizens of foreign birth or ancestry should be found responding to the subtle influence of blood and native land, and hoping, yes praying, for the success of that country to which they are thus so naturally inclined. And God forbid that it should be otherwise, for we all of us would despise an individual who in these circumstances would turn his back on the

land of his birth. And the manifestation by them of this feeling, to my mind, is not an alarming symptom. It is but convincing evidence that they are natural and normal beings, possessed of those natural instincts and impulses upon which the superstructure of loyalty to this country must be based, if it is to endure.

But there is a limitation upon this impulse as natural as the impulse itself, and that is, that when an issue arises between the United States and some other nation, or, indeed, between the United States and all the other nations of the earth combined and at one time, and the supremacy of the Stars and Stripes, or the flag or flags of some other country or countries is the issue to be determined, then from that moment we must all be Americans and nothing but Americans, no longer recognizing any sub-nationalities, but willing to yield up our lives to preserve this nation, and this no matter what our former ties or inclinations of blood or birth may be.

And I have faith to believe that there is something so pleasing and engaging about the spirit of American liberty that no foreign citizen can long breathe its sacred atmosphere without in effect being born again of the spirit of a new freedom, and being baptized in the purifying blood of the fathers, to become, as it were, a new child in a new country. And his former allegiance, with its accompanying knowledge of that country's more or less restricted privilege and lack of opportunity, will but supply a concrete standard of comparison by which he may truly understand and appreciate how abundantly he is blessed as a citizen of this country.

And it is the inspiration of lives



like that of Abraham Lincoln, and the principles for which he stood, that will make this consummation not only possible, but easy and certain of accomplishment. For it has been truly said the unique power which enables America to welcome men from all parts of the world, and to turn them into loyal citizens, is that America is a country that looks forward instead of backward, and whose ideals are principles instead of traditions.

Let us not, therefore, overlook the fact that "the primal glory of the American spirit is that it is a blend of all that Europe has to offer", and let us judge not, that we be not judged. But if we must judge, let us not pass judgment unheard. And until we see some indication that our citizens of foreign blood are lacking in loyalty to this country, at a time when the institutions of this country are threatened let us do them and ourselves the honor to think that an American citizen is a loyal citizen and not a traitor.

Perhaps my thinking along this line is rather to be expected, for it will be recalled that less than fifty years ago ex-Confederate soldiers, of which my father is one, were called traitors; and to a much later day, and well within my own recollection, it was a vital question in many sections of the country as to whether the sons of the Southland could ever be depended upon as loyal citizens of America. But when the cry went up to "Remember the Maine," and the Spanish-American war was the result, Fighting Joe Wheeler and Fitzhugh Lee, speaking in behalf of the people of the Southland, made a rather emphatic answer to that question. And throughout the land of the magnolia and the mocking bird will the Natal Day of Abraham

Lincoln be celebrated with the same enthusiasm we experience here this evening, and he will be hailed as the incomparable hero of an indissoluble union, and there will be no trace of the Mason and Dixon line through their patriotism.

There are, however, it seems to me, two general classes of danger to this country, to be carefully guarded against. The one is danger of invasion from without, and the other is the more subtle danger of decay from within. And each is worthy of our very best thought. It is now quite generally agreed that we should have an adequate army and navy to defend us against attack from without, and to enable us to resent insults to our flag, and to protect the rights of American citizens in all parts of the world. And God forbid that any American should advocate our not being thus prepared. The difference of opinion, however, is upon the question as to what is adequate, and what constitutes a reasonably strong army and navy for these purposes. And I shall not pause this evening and tire you with a discussion of this much-mooted question. But, upon the other hand, it is of equal, if not greater importance, that we look well to our domestic household and keep it in order, and see to it that we are developing a strong, clean, intelligent, upright citizenship, imbued with unquestioned patriotism, a patriotism based upon a thorough understanding of American institutions.

I sometimes think that many men in modern public affairs imagine that they are not accomplishing any useful purpose, or doing anything worth while, unless they are advocating some radical amendment to the National

Constitution. And while I do not want to be understood as standing in the way of onward march of progress, or as preaching, in the affairs of American government, the doctrine of "laissez faire," for I understand "that new occasions teach new duties and that time makes ancient good uncouth", yet I do want to be understood as advocating this principle, that radical changes in or departure from the organic law of the land should only be made upon the clearest demands of necessity, and then only after the most careful and deliberate consideration and reflection of which the sober judgment of the American people is capable.

Some will no doubt suggest that many of our most important rights and safeguards are to be found in the amendments to the Constitution, and that, indeed, the crystallization of the life-work of Abraham Lincoln thus finds its way into the organic law. Candor compels an admission of that fact. But it should also be borne in mind that these amendments have been largely in the nature of additions to the Constitution, and are not radical departures from its fundamental principles. And I am urging a conservative course when we come to altering or departing from those great foundation principles upon which this government has securely rested thus far, and has developed and prospered as has no other nation upon God's footstool of which the history of mankind contains any record.

And again I want to suggest that perhaps, in our great commercial and other activities—I had almost said our race for gold—we are not paying sufficient attention to what may properly be called the homely virtues, I mean the kind of which Abraham Lincoln

was the embodiment, and the practice of which won for him a place in the hearts of the American people that will perhaps never be equalled. It should be our effort, it seems to me, to impress upon the children of this generation who are to be the citizens and defenders of the next, the wholesome truth that success in life is not to be measured in terms of self, but in terms of character and of service. We should make them understand and appreciate the dignity of useful labor, in whatever field of honest effort it may be employed, the beauty of simple truth, the grandeur of common honesty, the majesty of loyal patriotism, and the universality of justice. So that when trouble comes, if come it must, we will have a great, stalwart body of intelligent Americans, bringing to bear upon the responsibilities of life the composite strength of harmoniously developed characters, and who will be able to meet the tasks of life, both in times of war and peace, in the spirit of intelligent loyalty, and in the love and fear of God.

In conclusion I desire to refer to the achievements of Abraham Lincoln, and they have been so beautifully summarized by his great secretary that I think I had better not attempt any improvement. "The sincerity of the fathers of the Republic was impugned; Lincoln justified them. The Declaration of Independence was characterized as a string of glittering generalities, and a self-evident lie; Lincoln refuted the aspersion. The Constitution was perverted; Lincoln corrected the error. The flag was insulted, and trailed in the dirt at Fort Sumter; but Lincoln caused it to be unfurled in added glory at Appomattox. The government was assailed; Lincoln restored



its authority. Human slavery thrust the sword of civil war at the heart of the nation, but Lincoln crushed slavery, and cemented the purified Union in new and stronger bonds. And all the while conciliation was as active as vindication was stern."

Yes, my friends, it must be agreed that, viewed from all angles, Abraham Lincoln is easily the greatest character America has ever produced, and his life is a national inspiration. And let

us, this evening, acting under the influence of that inspiration, and bearing in mind the wholesome lesson found plainly written upon the pages of history, both ancient and modern, that the nation that forgets God shall surely die, offer anew to the Throne of Grace the fervent prayer that first rang out from the hills of Gettysburg, "that this nation under God, with its government of the people, by the people and for the people, may never perish from the earth."

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